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Woodlands: a disappearing landscape

by David Lindenmayer, Mason Crane and Damian Michael

Photographs by Esther Beaton
With contributions from Christopher MacGregor and Ross Cunningham

Publisher: *CSIRO Publishing*, 2005.
150 pages, hardcover; colour photos.
ISBN 0643090266. RRP \$39.95

The wonderful woodlands of south-eastern Australia are not at the forefront of people's minds when conjuring up images of Australia's world-renowned natural environment.

For a long time, woodlands have been relegated down the list of preferred vegetation communities. The very zen-like structure of woodlands, and the gentle landscapes in which they occur have, sadly, contributed to their downfall. Their park-like appearance drew anglophiles of the 18th and 19th centuries, and the ease with which they could be cleared made them susceptible to further degradation.

This is where *Woodlands: a disappearing landscape* comes in. The book takes you on a journey through Australia's woodland heritage, and the seasonal and

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structural components of the woodlands, paying attention to many different aspects of the woodlands, both biotic and abiotic. This book takes you from the canopy to the ground layer, exploring the world beneath the bark of ancient gums, the cool mud of swampy wetlands, and the fine construction of a Willie Wagtail's nest. As soon as you read this beautifully presented special interest book you'll be planning your next picnic or bushwalk.

This book targets a wider audience than the scientific community – it has its roots in science, but appeals to the general community through the use of stunning photographs, diagrams and easy to follow chapters and subheadings. My favourite photo is of a Cunningham's Skink basking on a rock beneath a brooding stormy sky (page 81).

The authors go far beyond the stereotypical aesthetic appeal of our natural environment, evidenced by the attention paid to invertebrates. Witchetty grubs, centipedes, jewel spiders and golden orb spiders are just a few of the many invertebrates featured in the colourful photographs, as well as being discussed in the text.

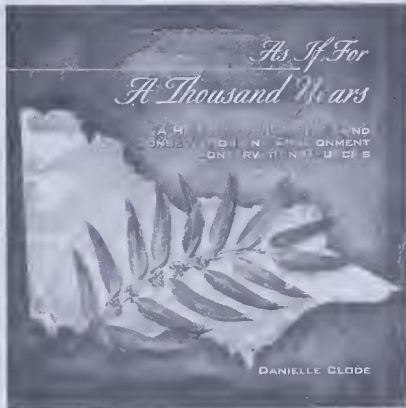
This book does not aim to be a scientific reference, although it does draw on some excellent resources, imploring the reader to study further. The bibliography spans seven pages, and is broken into subheadings including Mammals, Frogs and Reptiles, and Plants, with the largest section being Background Scientific Literature. The final two chapters, (Woodland Management and Conservation and The Future) are the most pertinent, as the authors venture beyond dire forecasts and faint messages of hope. Instead, concise, proven actions are provided for those striving to do more for these

wondrous landscapes. These actions are summarised well on page 132, and include steps such as 'Consider the size and shape of planting' and 'Leave dead saplings and trees as well as fallen branches and logs within restored areas – they will have important habitat value'.

Woodlands: a disappearing landscape has broad appeal, but in its final chapters funnels a range of information into a very precise direction, which is to ensure that future generations can enjoy woodlands as much as we do. It would be ideal for landowners who wish to learn more about and enhance the woodlands on their properties, and would be well received by any naturalist.

Rebecca J Steer

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As if for a thousand years: a history of Victoria's Land Conservation and Environment Conservation Councils

by Danielle Clode

Publisher: *Victorian Environmental
Assessment Council, Melbourne 2006*
ISBN 1741524636 RRP \$20 00

The Land Conservation Council (LCC) (1971–1997) and its successors, the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) (1998–2001) and the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) (2002–present) are a 'uniquely successful public land planning system like no other in the world' (p. 136), so a good history of decision-making about the most appropriate use of public land is both valuable and timely. Clode's scholarship is accessible, data-rich, informative and readable.

Histories of public institutions, particularly those commissioned or published by

the institutions themselves, have a high risk of being sanitised 'spin'. Clode avoids this by skilfully interweaving insightful and frank comments of both the political and other players (e.g. Ministers Borthwick and Kirner, Calder) into a readable 'story'. The socio-political milieu in which the institution was created is very well covered and the context of subsequent changes is well explained. After the Little Desert debate of the late 1960s (to clear or not to clear?), Bill Borthwick became Minister of Lands, Soldier Settlement and Conservation (*my how we have changed*).